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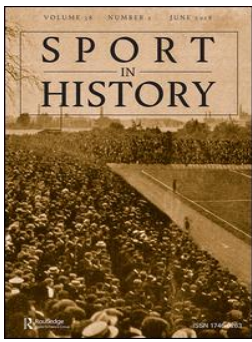
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## 'Frae Land o' Lakes to land o' Cakes': curling, Scotland, Sweden, and historical undercurrents

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### ABSTRACT

This article uses curling to explore the relationship between Scotland and Sweden during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A long-term formal and (after the Union of 1707) informal relationship existed between the nations, particularly with regard to the Thirty Years' War and Jacobitism, both of which established a Scottish presence in Gothenburg. Curling entered Sweden through this pipeline in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, with Sweden's first known club, Bohuslän Curling Club (*Bohuslänska Curlingklubben*), formed at Uddevalla in 1852 by the Thorburn-Macfie family and associates; the family ran an industrial concern selling oats for horses powering London's expanding transport network. Curling remained confined to Uddevalla until the first Nordic Games (*Nordiska Spelen*) in 1901, whereby the sport became part of a programme emphasising elite ideas of sport. Later iterations of the Games would feature Scottish curlers. In the 1920s and 1930s, semi-regular trips were also arranged between Scotland and Sweden by the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (RCCC) and the Swedish Curling Union (*Svensk Curlingförbundet*); here, while the game was placed within a contemporary royalist, martial, and racial context by RCCC and public officials, reference points recalled the pre-Union relationship between the two nations as pertained to the Thirty Years' War.

### Introduction

This article uses curling to examine aspects and episodes in the historic relationship between Scotland and Sweden. Within Scotland/the UK, Scotland's historic sporting relationship with Scandinavia is typically discussed in the public sphere by examples most covered in the press, and usually within men's football. Superstars like Celtic's Henrik Larsson have generated a great deal of attention as being representative of a kind of Nordic sporting

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stardom, while low-key but significant managers and coaches such as Ronny Deila, Mixu Paatelainen, and Ebbe Skovdahl have largely escaped this routine attention, despite being regular fixtures on nightly newscasts in Scotland for the past thirty years – not to mention many other examples, such as the Swedish Örjan Persson and Lennart Wing, both of whom played for Dundee United in the 1960s (Persson additionally played for Rangers).<sup>1</sup> Most academic historiography, meanwhile (and arguably more substantively, in terms of its legacy), has discussed the Scottish (and British) relationship with Sweden and Denmark as it has pertained to physical education, and to the long-lasting influences of Per Henrik Ling, Martina Bergman-Österberg, Hans Grunnet Junker, and their disciples on the way that physical education has been taught in Scottish schools, especially with regard to girls' PE and the development of gendered versions of 'male' sports.<sup>2</sup> This article, however, argues that there is still much more to look at with regard to both the historical crossover between Scottish and Scandinavian sport. As such, this work examines how aspects of this relationship reflect continuous historical undercurrents which predate the 1707 formation of the United Kingdom of Scotland with England.

This article discusses aspects of the Scottish-Swedish relationship which do not neatly correlate to (and even contradict) the more radical-left and (more prominently) social-democratic Scottish nationalist politics of the mid- to late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries, as it is generally understood in academia, the press, and public discourse at large.<sup>3</sup> During the twenty-first century, within these pro-independence intellectual circles, Nordic social policy and constitutional politics are typically discussed as aspirational examples for a presumptive Scottish state, most notably by broadcaster and commentator Lesley Riddoch.<sup>4</sup> This includes potential alternative routes for sport, exercise, and (in particular) outdoor activity and land access, with (in Riddoch's case) Norway argued as having a better organised and deeper historic and legal commitment to egalitarian practices.<sup>5</sup> Michael Keating and Malcolm Harvey note, however, that the 'Nordic welfare model' envied by the Scottish independence movement, whilst very attractive, has never been a uniformly understood concept between different Scandinavian nations, and has in fact come under heavy pressure from shifting global economics since the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Newby also argues that 'Norden', both in the imagination of the pro-independence movement and its critics, tends to be used rhetorically as an imagined place, with its favourable (and unfavourable) aspects cherry-picked at the expense of a much fuller picture, one which typically takes into account crucial national differences.<sup>7</sup> Newby also argues that this has long been the case: that British (not just Scottish) political and intellectual culture for the past two centuries has stressed darker historical commonalities and connections with Scandinavia which, while shifting according to the geopolitics of the

moment, also have much to do with a shared history of anti-Catholicism and scientific discourses on race.<sup>8</sup> Elements of this shared history finds their way into some of what is discussed in this article.

Curling provides an excellent example through which to examine the tensions between Scotland's geographic and often cultural place as a part of 'northern Europe', whilst critically examining that place vis-à-vis what Scotland assumed was its equal partnership with England at the head of the British Empire. Towards that end, this article examines three aspects of Scotland's curling relationship with Sweden. First, it begins by discussing the presence of curling in Sweden by the mid-nineteenth century, in the town of Uddevalla, within a social circle dominated by resident members of the Scottish diaspora who were agricultural industrialists. Second, the article examines the inclusion of curling at the Nordic Games (*Nordiska Spelen*) between 1901 and 1926, an inclusion that initially had little to do with relationships with British sport (which Sweden certainly had), and more to do with a domestic understanding of the social and political purpose of sport unique to Sweden. In turn, this will also allow for a discussion on where exactly the Nordic Games sit within Scottish/British sport history. Finally, this article will conclude by examining Scottish and Swedish curlers' tours of each others' countries during the 1920s and 1930s, and how the meanings of these tours were discussed (particularly in Scotland) at length by the politicians, aristocrats, and sporting administrators who hosted and accompanied the teams. Quite often, the tours were seen to exist in the monarchist, martial, and even racial context of the period, but with that context being defined within a much older relationship between Sweden and a pre-Union Scotland, particularly with regard to fighting on the same side in the Thirty Years' War (and, in doing so, arguably reflecting interwar insecurities about conflict and political realignment within Europe). To that end, this article makes use of digital newspaper repositories to examine Scottish/UK and Swedish newspapers and periodicals, as well as documents relating to the history of Swedish curling held at the Bohuslän Archive (*Bohusläns Föreningsarkiv*) at Uddevalla.

## Scotland and Sweden

The continuing historiographical discussion regarding what constitutes 'national' Scottish sport, as something reflective of Scottish national identity, within the context of class, politics, and the broader Scottish diaspora, provides a starting point for examining the presence of curling in Scandinavia.<sup>9</sup> It is not typically curling which is used towards radical understandings of the Scottish nation and nationhood. The sport is not shinty, many of whose leading figures were significant agitators in both Highland land politics and, after the First World War, the budding Scottish independence

movement, and whose most important transnational relationships were with Ireland.<sup>10</sup> Curling and its iconography have been typically recognised as uniquely Scottish, even if there continues to be debate about where the game actually originated: some evidence exists (in a Flemish painter's work) of a similar sport being played in the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, around the same time as the earliest known curling stones in Scotland are said to exist from.<sup>11</sup> The sport's founding codifying *institutions* were created in Scotland, however: most notably, the Grand Caledonian Curling Club in 1838, which with royal patronage in 1843 would become the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (RCCC). The sport arguably has presented a more conservative vision of Scotland to the world: a sport with royal patronage and a material-cultural element which has stressed continuity, rather than revolution.<sup>12</sup> It has also typically represented communities in lowland Scotland, rather than Highland, even though there is some geographical overlap. Prior to codification, curling was, like football, a mass-participant tradition.<sup>13</sup>

Curling's global geography also has not strictly overlapped with the former territory of the British Empire: Scots certainly were crucial in the foundations and maintenance of curling in Canada, the world's most successful curling nation, and John Kerr in his fiftieth anniversary of the RCCC in 1890 noted that New Zealand had several clubs started by Scots.<sup>14</sup> The sport, though, would find its most passionate adherents in nations with the climactic capability of supporting outdoor curling; the invention of the artificial curling rink in the early 1830s by John Cairney, who would later become the first president of the RCCC, did not immediately change curling's status as an outdoor (and often mass participant) sport.<sup>15</sup> Usually, even in these locations, middle-class Scottish men who migrated for work were crucial in the initial setup of clubs. Kerr in particular noted organised Russian curling during the 1870s and 1880s as having Scottish men at its heart, and also noting the then sole Norwegian curling club, Elverhae, as being linked to the Evenie club in Forfar. By contrast, he did not note curling in Sweden at all.<sup>16</sup> Ruth Ann Howe, in her 1968 PhD thesis at the University of Indiana, stated that curling had existed in Britain's North American colonies (the future United States of America) within Scottish communities by the eighteenth century, and that Scots were crucial to the first formal clubs set up in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota in the 1840s and 1850s; the Grand National Curling Club of America, modelled on the RCCC and proposing to be a national governing body of the sport, was set up in New York in 1867, and initially dominated by Scottish-Americans in New York, New Jersey, and Ohio.<sup>17</sup> The historiography which discusses curling in Switzerland, however, places its foundation largely within late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century health and tourist resorts in the Alps, more dependent on manmade rinks and less outside of the immediate sphere of Scots and their individual business connections.<sup>18</sup>

Swedish curling and its relationship with Scots, the Scottish diaspora, and Scotland, then, presents arguably a unique case study with regard to this. Most recent examinations of Scots, sport, and the diaspora take place in the context of colonialism, and discuss the need for emigrant Scots to stress their own unique identity within the British Empire, reflective of both the push from Scotland via the Highland Clearances and the collapse of heavy industry, but also the complicity of Scottish participation in Empire in positions of power.<sup>19</sup> In general, this has been reflective of a much larger reckoning over the Scottish role in Empire, most notably with regard to slavery.<sup>20</sup> (Certainly, the Macfies, who will be discussed shortly, even if not yet emigres in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, owed their initial wealth to ownership of a Greenock sugar refinery. The sugar trade was inextricably linked to West Indian slave labour and its legacy.<sup>21</sup>) Canada and New Zealand (and the United States) were certainly settler colonies of the British Empire, but in the historiography of Scotland, and sport more broadly, much less has been said about the post-1707 relationship of Scottish migrants to Europe, and that too is accordingly reflected in 'British' histories of sport and their lack of a focus on larger 'European' patterns.<sup>22</sup> Mirroring contemporary debates over nationhood and statehood (as well as future sporting success and acclaim), it is perhaps significant that one of the few examples outside of Scandinavia focuses on the sporting contributions of Scottish industrial labourers to the emerging football culture of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Catalonia.<sup>23</sup>

In part, this article builds upon the author's previous research on Scottish football clubs' tours of Scandinavia (mostly focused on Denmark) during the period 1898–1914.<sup>24</sup> Here, the likes of Queen's Park, Celtic, Rangers, and Heart of Midlothian, and their middle-class counterparts in the Danish Football Association (*Dansk Boldspil Union*, DBU) were building upon a transport and economic infrastructure in the agricultural and dairy industry which heavily linked the UK (including Scotland's and the north of England's east coast) to Copenhagen and Hamburg after the defeat of Denmark to Prussia in the Second Schleswegian War in 1864. In the years afterwards, middle-class Scots resided in Copenhagen, whilst Danish businessmen travelled to the UK, and this cross-traffic ensured the presence of football and cricket in Denmark by the late 1870s.<sup>25</sup>

At least in terms of historical circumstances of its relationship with Scots, however, Sweden presents a different case than Denmark. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Scots had considerable business connections with Sweden and Swedish firms, based as they were within longer-term continuous cultural and military relationships. The pre-1560 Scottish alliance with France – the so-called 'Auld Alliance' – has gained an almost mythical place in both Scottish historiography and popular culture, but this has come

largely at the expense of what Alexia Grosjean in her 2003 book referred to as the 'unofficial alliance' of Scotland and Sweden between 1569 and 1654.<sup>26</sup> This period included Scotland and Sweden taking up arms on together on anti-Habsburg side of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) (with Scots under the command of the Swedish king), and in turn Sweden being the first nation to recognise the Covenanters' regime in 1640.<sup>27</sup> Steve Murdoch argues the experience of Scots in Sweden during this period set a precedent for being able to obtain wealth and (sometimes) titles in Sweden which were often unavailable in Scotland.<sup>28</sup> Scots were certainly not the only Britons to make their home in Sweden. In Gothenburg from the early seventeenth century onwards, a significant number of the resident mercantile community were British, and this significant business and social presence continued well into the late nineteenth century, so much so that Gothenburg would become known as 'Little London'.<sup>29</sup> Göran Behre additionally argued that Scots formed a significant part of Gothenburg's British community during the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

But some Scots had additional reasons to live in Sweden, and/or to do business there. Significantly, in the period before and after the 1745–46 Jacobite Rebellion, Sweden and Gothenburg in particular served as a major hub of European support for the deposed Stewarts: during the '45, Gothenburg was alleged to serve as the site to supply the Jacobite rebels in Scotland, and to be the launching place of a rescue attempt for the Stewart claimant to the British/Scottish throne Charles Edward Stewart – neither of which ended up happening due to logistical and political hurdles.<sup>31</sup> However, officials in the city, particularly those involved with the Swedish East India Company (SEIC), did end up rescuing 44 fleeing Jacobite leaders from Scotland.<sup>32</sup> And it was the SEIC which furthermore gave Scots an opportunity to take part in global trade – and empire – without having to do so within the confines of 'British' institutions. Scots, including known Jacobites, were significant in the 1731 foundation of the SEIC, and continued to play a pivotal role in the Company for generations.<sup>33</sup> The SEIC traded tea from Asia, and were a significant supplier of tea smuggled into Scotland and the north of England. The trade broke the British East India Company's legally binding monopoly over the British trade, and merchants and traders involved with the SEIC were additionally evading the British government's exorbitant tax on the wholesale product; it was such an open secret that 'Gottenburgh Tea' was openly advertised as a brand in Scottish newspapers.<sup>34</sup> Several elements, then, of Scotland's relationship with Sweden existed outwith wholly 'British' frames of reference, even if it overlapped with more neatly with others. The very nature of curling, its global reach, and its awkward place within the Scottish/British sporting hierarchy would similarly provide an example of Sweden's continued communion with elements of



Scottish-ness along lines which did not neatly correspond to the emerging UK state itself.

### The Thorburn-Macfies and curling at Uddevalla

Within academic literature on sport, the Scottish influence on Swedish sport is perhaps most noted in football. As with Denmark and Norway, in the pre-1914 period Sweden hosted regular tours from UK football clubs, as well as hired Scottish coaches – part of what Torbjörn Andersson and Hans Hognestad believe was a ‘pedagogical strategy’ on the part of Scandinavian footballers to learn about technical aspects of the game (which they, in turn, likened to the phenomenon of Scots being hired to design golf courses in Scandinavia).<sup>35</sup> While early Danish, Norwegian, and even Icelandic football had their share of Scottish skilled workers resident in the country who were responsible for elements of the game’s popularity, Swedish football was particularly significant in having Örgryte IS, a Gothenburg football (and athletics and gymnastics) club formed in 1892 whose early successes were credited to its Scottish members, more familiar with rules and tactics than their non-migrant Swedish opponents.<sup>36</sup> These Gothenburg Scots worked in a textile factory, at AB Svenska Gardinfabriken in Gothenburg, and most would later return to Scotland.<sup>37</sup> In a reflection of the more unsettling aspects of the economics which drove the rise of global football, one local history in Newmilns, Ayrshire from 1990 claimed some early Örgryte members as their own, as well as significant figures in the early Barcelona football scene: they were part of a long-term migration of skilled textile workers from Ayrshire caused by the collapse of the lace industry, itself caused by the halt of imports of cotton from the US’s slave states during and after the American Civil War.<sup>38</sup>

John Ashton, in his 2003 book on the British community in Gothenburg, certainly noted Örgryte’s success as a triumph of Scottish players. It is not *workers* he praises for introducing curling, however; rather, it is *owners*: in this case, the Thorburn family, a dynasty of Scots emigres based at the town of Uddevalla, north of Gothenburg.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Jonas Berg, in 1981 (updating a pamphlet *Scots in Sweden*, which Berg and Bo Lagercrantz authored in 1962) stated that ‘a son of William Thorburn, together with a couple of other Scots, RH Jobson and WA Macfie, introduced the Scottish national game of curling, and their club, founded in 1846, still exists today’.<sup>40</sup> Bob Cowan, blogger on Scottish curling history (and the author of one of the few Anglophone pieces which examines the curling relationship of Scotland and Sweden), credits William Andrew Macfie as first coming up with the idea of starting a curling club, an idea he was initially aware of from Robin Welsh’s 1969 book *Beginners’ Guide to Curling*; his opinion was reinforced after reading Swedish curling magazine editor Håkan

Sundstrom's 100th anniversary book written for the Swedish Curling Union (*Svensk Curlingförbundet*, SCF) in 2016.<sup>41</sup> Cowan notes in his research, however, that Macfie, born in 1807 in Greenock and raised there afterwards, was not a known figure in the Renfrewshire town's curling scene. (Macfie himself was already related to the Thorburns: Macfie's wife, Jessie Thorburn – the daughter of William Thorburn and Jessie Macfie Thorburn – was his first cousin.)<sup>42</sup>

Sundstrom's theories overlap with Paul Ahlgren's and Gunnar Klasson's reflections on the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Bohuslän Curling Club (*Bohuslänska Curlingklubben*, BCK) in 2002: and here, whilst Scots had consistently played curling at Uddevalla since 1846, and Macfie – the son-in-law of William Thorburn (who died in 1851) was the first to attempt to form a club in the same year – it was 5 March 1852 that BCK was formed and had its first meeting, with Macfie, the younger William Thorburn, Robert Thorburn, and Jobson, and others (Swedish men) also present. The club quickly drafted rules which were based on those of the RCCC.<sup>43</sup> It would be some years later, however, before Ailsa Craig curling stones – the standard used by the RCCC from its 1843 inception – were imported with regularity from Scotland, and until that point BCK had to make do with stones produced with local granite in Uddevalla, ones that could not withstand cracking into each other. But Klasson also states that a visitor to William Thorburn's family estate at Kasen, outside of Uddevalla, in 1824 – a year after the Thorburns' arrival, brought them two curling stones from Scotland, and that this may have been the first time curling was ever played in Sweden.<sup>44</sup> A song written for the occasion of the club's hundredth anniversary in 1952 credited Macfie for bringing the game from Scotland, but local newspaper *Bohusläns Allehanda* in October 1888 credited another Scot who had only been in Uddevalla temporarily before leaving.<sup>45</sup> The very minor disputes over who specifically created the club ultimately matter little, beyond indicating that it was within this group of Scottish men that the first formal Swedish curling club was created.

The Thorburn-Macfies and others were part of a new wave of Scottish capitalists that arrived in Sweden in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Trade between the UK and Sweden increased significantly during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) in response to a blockade of continental Europe, whereby Gothenburg became a significant way station for trading in between the UK and the continent.<sup>46</sup> William Thorburn, originally from Leith and the son of a tea merchant, arrived in Sweden in 1823 at age 43, in part through his brother James, who was a partner at a Gothenburg firm.<sup>47</sup> Thorburn was not the first Scottish industrialist to look for opportunities in the countryside north of Gothenburg: Montrose men James and Robert Dickson, later famous in Gothenburg for their significant philanthropic works, rapidly expanded their (environmentally damaging) timber works

and sawmills into the north of Sweden during the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>48</sup> Thorburn's and his family's own move to Uddevalla precipitated his venture into commodities: more specifically, oats. The oats exported to the UK by William Thorburn and Sons (*William Thorburns Söner*) from the late 1840s through 1900 were not for human consumption; they were primarily to feed the rapidly expanding horse population of the UK, specifically those used in coaches and other transport in and around a growing London. This coincided with the growth of railways in Sweden from the 1850s onwards, which facilitated even greater access to British markets.<sup>49</sup> Twenty first-century organisational histories of curling in Sweden make continual references to 'hungriga hästar' ('hungry horses') as being responsible for the sport's presence in the country.<sup>50</sup>

After William Thorburn's death in 1851, William Franklin Thorburn and Robert Thorburn continued to run the family business; William Franklin was locally a powerful figure, and was also a member of the upper house of the Swedish Parliament, the *Riksdag*, from 1867 to 1869.<sup>51</sup> But in later years it would be Robert's son Alban Thorburn who would become the primary figure in BCK (though certainly not the only member of his family to remain a member). In 1889, a 27-year-old Alban – noted locally and nationally as a distance cycling pioneer – would become the director at what was then the ailing family business.<sup>52</sup> Up to that point, curling was confined largely to Uddevalla and the Thorburns' initiatives. Indeed, *Bohusläns Allehanda*, when discussing the rules and practices of the game in their 1888 article, noted that 'curling is one of our city's specialities', and that, 'although the game has been played here [in Uddevalla] ... for 36 years, it has not gained a foothold in any other part of the kingdom'.<sup>53</sup> It would take the Nordic Games for curling to be noted by a wider audience within Sweden, and for the Swedish game to be acknowledged within an international competitive circuit. And the Thorburns, as members of the new industrial elite of Sweden, were arguably more representative of a vanguard driving Swedish sport than the initial low popularity of curling would indicate.

### **Curling, 'Britain', and the Nordic Games**

At first glance, the appearance of curling at the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) International Winter Sports Week, held from 25 January to 4 February 1924 at Chamonix in France (retroactively labelled the first Winter Olympics by the IOC two years later) might resemble the thinly-contested and fleeting appearances of both official and 'demonstration' tournaments in the early post-1896 summer Olympiads involving rugby union and cricket. Both were conspicuously 'British' disciplines ('English', even, in the case of cricket) whose presence was arguably more reflective of the

social class of sportsmen and administrators present than any genuine organisational enthusiasm on the part of major British sporting bodies to take place in these tournaments. (Pierre de Coubertin, after all, was one of French rugby union's top referees.)<sup>54</sup>

There are differences, however. Curling, at least in Scotland, may have had significant noble and elite patronage, and it was responsible for building the sport's organisational capacity in the nineteenth century – men of privilege certainly enjoyed it – but its membership was in many communities significantly derived from the professional middle class and the skilled working class. And, unlike for instance rugby, curling's transition from a mass-participant village tradition to a streamlined sport with rules and codes did not take place within British private schooling's 'games cult', and in large part occurred decades before the likes of HH Almond created curricula based around sport.<sup>55</sup> Curling's appearance in the Winter Olympics may have been fleeting – it would not appear again as a regular, official, men's-and-women's event until the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, and only a few other times in between as a demonstration event – but the 1924 contest was significant in two ways. First, the RCCC themselves selected a British team to head to Chamonix. Second, despite this, it was arguably Nordic influence which was more significant than that of the RCCC regarding the entry of curling into the Olympic movement, for what is now referred to as the 1924 Winter Olympics was significant for supplanting a largely Swedish-controlled winter sporting event, the Nordic Games.<sup>56</sup> And the Nordic Games certainly featured (some) British participants, curling, and (eventually) Scottish/British curlers.

The Nordic Games, which took place in 1901, 1903, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1917, 1922, and 1926 – all times but one in Stockholm (in 1903, it took place in Christiania, now Oslo) – are quite often discussed retroactively in relation to the Olympic movement as part of an inevitable march to the Winter Olympics.<sup>57</sup> However, whilst the upper-class (but not aristocratic) leadership of Swedish sport during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century had strong relationships with the IOC in its early years, the creation and maintenance of the Nordic Games were part of a concerted effort by these same leaders – particularly Colonel Victor Balck, original IOC member and the dominant figure in Swedish sport during the period – to use sport to stress more explicitly nationalist aims within a pan-Nordic framework, as well as to use organised sport for tourist purposes, as a means of marketing Swedish modernity, culture, and landscape. Sweden, for this reason, fought vehemently against the introduction of a Winter Olympics, and along with Norway and Denmark did not send athletes to Chamonix in 1924 – an event whose sports and disciplines were to some extent modelled on the Nordic Games.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the rise of 'sport movements' as popular movements in the Nordic nations during the period – akin, as Jan Lindroth states, to the 'temperance movement' or the 'scout movement' – was significant.<sup>59</sup> Its development in early-twentieth century Sweden was a response to the radical changes seen in the nation's economy during the nineteenth century: an ideological, top-down development of sport on a national level.<sup>60</sup> Sport controlled and designed by workers was not a significant feature of Swedish sport until the 1930s, parallel to the election of a Social Democratic government and the beginnings of a Swedish welfare state.<sup>61</sup> Balck's goal, then, of providing an organisational framework for sport in Sweden and the Nordic world was, from a regional perspective, far better acknowledged and understood than Coubertin's more internationalist goals, and thus Balck also being a driving force behind the hosting of the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm – an event which purported to telegraph the arrival of Sweden on the world stage – was ultimately not seen as contradictory.<sup>62</sup> In the case of the Nordic Games, the use of sport as a nationalist tool was arguably a double-edged sword. Balck lobbied heavily within the IOC for Norway, still in union with Sweden, to have its separate sporting organisations internationally recognised: the Norwegian Nordic Games team, however, was used as a means of agitating on behalf of the nation, particularly in the run-up to the dissolution of Norway's union with Sweden in 1905, when the team boycotted the Games of that year.<sup>63</sup> Skiing, in particular, was seen as a means of asserting Norwegian national identity in the pre-First World War period.<sup>64</sup>

Nordic nations were not the only ones to participate in the Nordic Games. The Games have been noted with regard to Russian sport history (specifically in relation the official Soviet narrative of skiing's history vis-à-vis Finland), but the historiography of Scottish/British sport has yet to locate the Nordic Games in relation to it.<sup>65</sup> At least some of that has to do with labelling and translation: when covering the Nordic Games (hardly something which most did systematically), British newspapers referred to the event as 'the Northern Games'. Figure skating was an early point of reference for British sport to the Nordic Games, after its 'masculine', 'scientific', nineteenth-century English incarnation, and prior to its interwar 'feminisation' brought on by the global popularity of Norwegian Olympic champion Sonja Henie.<sup>66</sup> The International Skating Union's World Championships were due to be held in London in 1901, but after the death of Queen Victoria, the Championships were absorbed as part of the inaugural Nordic Games programme (albeit with no British competitors), and held on Nybroviken, a bay in central Stockholm.<sup>67</sup> The first British athletes to win championship awards and acclaim at the Nordic Games were figure skating pair Phyllis and James Johnson (and were accordingly photographed in their successful programme by the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*), but the *Daily Mail*

nevertheless stated that: 'It is a pity that British sportsmen should have been so sparsely represented at these northern games.'<sup>68</sup>

Balck – like most upper-class Swedes, an ardent admirer of 'English' sports – was keen to attract Britons both to participate, and to visit Sweden to see the Nordic Games; his and others' attempts were well-covered by *The Field*. On 22 June 1904, he gave a lecture with magic lantern show at the Society of Arts in London on the Nordic Games; the lecture was sponsored by the IOC, and afterwards Coubertin also gave a quick speech on the 'revival' of the Olympic Games.<sup>69</sup> Balck would make a similar presentation in London in 1906, as would scholar and Swedish Olympic Committee member Edward Adams-Ray at Kensington Town Hall in London in February 1909.<sup>70</sup>

Yet it was a visual emphasis on tourism and royalist connections which was most noticed by the British press; and, besides the *Illustrated News* and *The Field*, there was additionally a conspicuous amount of coverage in London's gossip periodicals focusing on images of Swedish royalty and aristocracy at the Games: *The Tatler* went as far as to devote its 24 February 1909 front cover of the 'Sporting and Country House Supplement' to the subject.<sup>71</sup> In terms of tourism, *The Sphere*, in February 1909, printed an entire tourism-based piece on Stockholm and the countryside in their 'Winter sports in the Land of St Erik'; and, even when the event was beginning to wind down in the mid-1920s, Thomas Cook was still advertising an illustrated handbook for 'the Northern Games' through *The Sketch*, one which billed Sweden as 'the home of Winter Sports'.<sup>72</sup> If there was disappointment that more British athletes did not attend the Nordic Games, then at least such branding was successful at marketing an enduring (and largely, in this context, conservative) stereotype of which the likes of Balck would have approved of. Especially in touristic contexts, the British upper class had long viewed sport and adventure in some imaginary Scandinavian and Arctic 'north' through a distinctly masculine lens.<sup>73</sup>

Curling fit more neatly into some of these sets of signifiers than others, but it nevertheless found itself being played at the first Nordic Games in 1901, as a display event, rather than an official one. It was Bohuslän, still the only stable curling club to be created in Sweden, that gave the exhibition. Stockholm's *Dagens Nyheter* noted on 13 February 1901 treated it as a novelty, and 'hardly one of the Nordic Games' – it claimed the game originated in Scotland, and was brought over by 'Consul W. Thorburn' – and hitherto a Swedish tradition unique to Uddevalla. 'If curling is not a Nordic game', noted the paper, 'the people of Uddevalla thought to come here to Stockholm to give us a show on Tuesday, and introduce the game throughout Sweden', believing that Sweden had plenty of necessary 'good ice and good granite'.<sup>74</sup> The paper also noted several of the curling players 'were old men, no less than three belonged to the Thorburn family'.<sup>75</sup>

The context of the match itself, also held at Nybroviken, arguably reinforced the class politics of Balck's own vision of sport: the match was attended not just by Crown Prince Gustav (the future King Gustav V), but also by an 'elite audience', and a group of 'foreign and domestic athletes and journalists [who] formed a circle around the curling rink'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, BCK had royal patronage itself from King Oscar II, and the long-serving king and the club shared a birthday that was typically celebrated by matches on ice in Uddevalla and a formal dinner afterwards.<sup>77</sup> Swedish scholars, in fact, have sometimes referred to the late-nineteenth century's dominant cultural philosophy as 'Oscarianism', a Swedish mirror of 'Victorianism' whereby popular culture reflected the tastes of the new upper-middle class.<sup>78</sup> Curling here, then, whilst acknowledging its Scottish roots (and in this case, the Scottish family at the centre of it), nevertheless inserted itself into the hierarchy of Swedish sporting values. In fact, *The Field's* contributor did not think they were witnessing anything resembling a traditional curling match:

Curling was indulged in by a local club, but the 'roaring game' as played here is very tame. One missed the exhilarating sight of the players with nimble brooms skipping before the flagging stone to an excited chorus of 'soop her up'. Where they neither sweep nor shout the fine fury of the game is lost.<sup>79</sup>

Regardless of what UK commentators might have thought, BCK were invited back to Stockholm in 1905. Balck himself sent a letter to the club welcoming them. At the same dinner where Balck's letter was read, 'due to the importance of the day' the club sent a telegram to the King and the Crown Prince to inform them of new members being elected. Then they played curling outside.<sup>80</sup>

Being given the opportunity for international matches closer to home than Canada made Sweden a logical location to travel for Scottish/British/RCCC curlers. In 1913, a team led by Dr James Rutherford and including at least one curler based in Switzerland headed to Stockholm, beating two amateur sides from Stockholm and thrashing BCK 24-1. But in the individual competition, Rutherford finished first with thirteen, and WG and Alban Thorburn finished tied for second with eight.<sup>81</sup> The team the RCCC sent to Sweden in the final Nordic Games of 1926, however, suffered at least some defeats at the hands of Swedish sides; the game in Sweden had clearly come some way.<sup>82</sup>

## Swedish curlers in Scotland

There is no doubt more to say about Scots' participation in Nordic Games curling, and much more still left to be said about British participation in the Nordic Games. But it is interesting to note that *The Scotsman*, in its



last 1926 report, labelled the travelling squad ‘the Scottish curling team’.<sup>83</sup> In Olympic contests of previous years, ‘Scottish’ and ‘British’ signifiers were often used interchangeably by Scottish newspapers to discuss Scottish athletes, but differed depending on the publication and the audience.<sup>84</sup> However, in the case of curling, this highlights a conundrum that Irene Reid states men’s and (especially) women’s Team GB Olympic curling squads of the future would face: representing the whole of the UK, whilst typically being comprised entirely of Scots.<sup>85</sup> (Ironically, this inverse relationship to the usual demographic distribution of British Olympic sporting representation meant that curling was not subjected to the bitter struggles British Olympic football and national football associations were known for.<sup>86</sup>) Indeed, at one 1929 Scotland-England curling international in Edinburgh, *The Scotsman* noted that the English team was ‘represented almost entirely by Scots, or men of Scottish extraction who are resident south of the Cheviots’.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, on the occasion, Sir Henry Ballantyne, then chairman of the RCCC, went on to give a speech which seemingly gave an alternative reading of British imperial history, in the context of contemporary political developments:

We hear a lot in these days ... about Home Rule for Scotland, but in curling not only had we Home Rule but we ruled the world. (Applause.) Whatever we might do the rules of curling had got to be bowed to by Canada, by England – (applause) – by New Zealand, by Sweden, and by all the other nations on earth who curled. The Royal Caledonian Curling Club ruled the world as far as that was concerned.<sup>88</sup>

This was more or less an accurate statement. As Richard Holt has stated, the RCCC’s position as the *de facto* governing body of world curling was akin to that of an elite tastemaker of the sport, similar to another significant ‘global’ Scottish sport organisation, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club.<sup>89</sup> (The 1966 creation of the International Curling Federation would end this arrangement.<sup>90</sup>)

But Ballantyne’s comment is an intriguing one regarding the emergence of a Scottish Home Rule movement and a new kind of nationalist, separatist political movement in Scotland after the First World War. The Scottish National Party (SNP), formed in 1934, was the product of a union between the National Party of Scotland (NPS) and Scottish Party (SP), themselves largely inchoate and disorganised political parties running the gamut from far-left to far-right respectively (and everything in between) amongst intellectuals calling for some kind of more independent relationship from the UK (with the degree to which differing depending on who was asked). The SNP, of course, would not see sustained electoral success until after the Second World War but Ballantyne’s comment (in a sporting context) was a hint of a different kind of rhetorical and substantial movement at



work within Scottish civic society during the interwar period.<sup>91</sup> Beyond broader geopolitical concerns during the interwar era, it arguably recontextualised the international reach of curling.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Scottish and Swedish curlers made semi-regular trips to each others' countries. The RCCC were invited by Swedish Curling Union, the SCF, to send a representative squad to Sweden in 1920, 1926, and 1932, whilst an SCF team was invited to Scotland in 1923, 1929, and 1935.<sup>92</sup> In these trips, the teams played a variety of formal and informal clubs at varying levels. According to *The Scotsman*, the 1920 RCCC squad which arrived in Stockholm in early February, and was captained by John McLeod of Bridge of Weir Curling Club, was there to contest the Swedish championships. It arrived in a curling landscape which was rapidly changing: the paper claimed that since 1894 eight clubs additional clubs to Bohuslän had been formed, facilitating the creation of SCF, which patterned its rules on the RCCC.<sup>93</sup> Once in the city (where the weather was unfortunately causing curling rinks to melt), the team was shown an impressive array of sights: aside from playing some curling (and being beaten, and unlike *The Field* years before, positively likening Swedish curling to the kind played in the Lanarkshire village of Biggar, 'very deadly with hard chipping shots'), the club met Crown Prince Gustav Adolf (the future King Gustav VI Adolf), Victor Balck ('the leader of all sports in Sweden'), SCF secretary Axel Bildt, British ambassador to Sweden Colville Barclay, a Mr Seton ('a Scotsman resident in Sweden'), amongst others, saw the National Museum and Zoo, toured baths near the Baltic Sea, and were entertained at a restaurant owned by the president of a Stockholm curling club. The RCCC team even went to Stockholm's Grand Opera where, according to the party member writing for *The Scotsman*, 'it was rather a surprise for us to hear our names mentioned on the stage'.<sup>94</sup>

The return trip of SCF to Scotland in December 1923, with a delegation led by Alban Thorburn, arriving at least in part to contest what the RCCC labelled the 'World's Championship', was no less grand. It certainly featured its fair share of tourism, including (on the first day) a trip to 'Scott Country' in the Borders, but also matches in Edinburgh against curling clubs from Edinburgh, Midlothian, West Lothian, Glasgow, and the Highlands.<sup>95</sup> After a welcome luncheon at Edinburgh's City Chambers (where, the day before, a curling club representing the Edinburgh Corporation and including several city councillors won 21–9 against the Swedish team), the RCCC would later, on 4 December, welcome the Swedes at a reception at Edinburgh's Caledonian Hotel: it was chaired by RCCC President Charles Douglas-Home, the 12th Earl of Home (father of future Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home). The Swedish curlers enjoyed a feast including risotto au foie gras, poularde braisée George V, and pommes dauphine,

and a list of toasts starting off with those to 'His Majesty the King' and 'His Majesty the King of Sweden'.<sup>96</sup>

The curlers themselves might not have believed these events to be particularly political, but there is no question that the club administrators who facilitated them, and the politicians who spoke at them, located sport within an explicitly political context, often within a broad swathe of history and international relations. British sport at the time, of course, projected an apolitical image with regard to international relations that hardly matched the reality, particularly in interwar Europe.<sup>97</sup> At the Edinburgh Corporation's welcome of the Swedish team in December 1923, Edinburgh Lord Provost William Lowrie Sleigh was noted by *The Scotsman* as saying:

All met as equals on the curling pond, and he believed that form of sport had done more to promote the spirit of universal brotherhood and friendliness than any other pastime ... Personally, he knew of no better way to keep men or nations on friendly terms than a game on the ice.<sup>98</sup>

In his response, Alban Thorburn noted that: 'They were not blind to the fact that the luncheon had been given to them in honour of their country', and that: 'A gathering [like this one] contributed much to the better understanding between different nations.'<sup>99</sup>

Twelve years later, in January 1935, a different Edinburgh Lord Provost, William Thomson, upon welcoming a different group of SCF select curlers, believed that: 'In sport and the principles of fair play and the team spirit which the word sport implied, we had a bond that was doing more than any elaborate diplomacy'.<sup>100</sup> At least part of Sleigh's and Thomson's justification for believing that this was possible through curling was the belief that social class mattered little in the sport. Thomson stated:

In Scotland, curling had always been popular. It was the great democratic game, in which laird and poacher, professional man and ploughman mingled freely – the game in which they forgot class distinctions and remember only that they were all keen sportsmen and lovers of the 'roaring game', as we called it here. This tradition had helped to make it one of the most genial pastimes imaginable.<sup>101</sup>

Twelve years earlier, Sleigh stated something similar: that 'one of the most pleasing features of the game was the fact that it was not confined to any one class or section of the community'.<sup>102</sup> But at the RCCC reception the next day, amongst the RCCC's titled high heid yins, he also provoked laughter by stating that 'curling was one of the games the [Edinburgh] Corporation did nothing for. Curling seemed to be one of the pastimes that was able to stand on its own legs ... It required no subsidy'.<sup>103</sup> The alleged meritocracy of curling, then, still required elite patronage of some kind.

Central to this problem was the foregrounding of Crown Prince Gustav Adolf in these accounts. 1920 would certainly not be the last time the

Crown Prince witnessed Scottish curlers come to Sweden; he also witnessed an RCCC team play in Stockholm in 1932.<sup>104</sup> Alban Thorburn, in 1923, credited the Crown Prince's creation of his own curling club for jumpstarting the game in Sweden.<sup>105</sup> At the RCCC's reception the next day, the Earl of Home went further when mentioning Gustav Adolf's recent marriage to Louise Mountbatten – the daughter of a famous admiral, and the aunt of Prince Philip (at the time of writing, the recently-deceased British Prince Consort) – as related to an even older bond, and here Home stressed continuities in *Scottish* history:

Two bonds joined this country and Sweden together. There was, first, the union of hearts between the gallant and courteous curler the Swedish Crown Prince and the daughter of the sailor Prince whom they all admired and respected so much in this country. (Applause.) The other bond was that as they had helped each other long ago for war, so they were now helping each other for peace. He hoped the people of Sweden and of this country would sweep away all the ill-feeling and the hatred and malice still lying on the great ice rink of Europe, so that when the children of to-day come down to play the great game of life they might find a nice clean rink to play on it.<sup>106</sup>

To what conflict was Home referring? The Thirty Years' War. Murdoch argues that the Thirty Years' War is one example of Scotland's pre-Union European history which is not commonly discussed within Scottish popular memory, and Siobhan Talbott additionally notes its place on the fringes of historical fiction.<sup>107</sup>

But the use of the War by this group of politicians, aristocrats, sporting administrators and others is different, and is intriguing for its arguable attempts to discuss shared incidences in the Scottish-Swedish relationship which pre-date the Union of 1707 – in ceremonies which otherwise arguably reflected the deeply conservative (with a small 'c'), imperialist, and 'unionist-nationalist' (and Presbyterian) consensus which Graeme Morton argues dominated Scottish politics in the nineteenth century.<sup>108</sup> Lord Provost Thomson at the 1935 ceremony for the Swedish curlers was additionally noting by *The Scotsman* as stating:

It was not generally realised what a strong affinity there was between the northern nations, not only physically and as regards the topographies of our respective countries, but in our mental outlook. A small thing like this mutual enthusiasm for a good, hardy, exhilarating winter sport, such as curling, emphasised an association which was formed centuries ago by a sterner comradeship. He referred to the time when Scotsmen of all ranks fought under the banner of Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years' War, and for a good cause. (Applause.) That particular alliance, in which thirteen Scottish regiments of infantry followed the great leader of Sweden, and won from him more than once ungrudging tribute for bravery on the field, was almost a forgotten byway of history. Yet it argued a kinship in aims and ideals which was strengthened, in more than one case, through Scottish gentlemen settling in

Sweden and marrying there. It was no uncommon thing to-day to encounter well-known Scottish family names in that country.<sup>109</sup>

Like Home's speech, a Burns-style verse composed by Rev A Gordon Mitchell – a Killearn, Stirlingshire Church of Scotland minister who served as the RCCC's chaplain – made combined references to curling, the Thirty Years' War, and the current Crown Prince. Similarly, it was read on the occasion of the same RCCC welcome reception in 1923:

Frae Land o' Lakes to land o' Cakes,  
We Scotsmen greet ye weel, Sirs.  
Eh freen's its graun to grip ilk haun,  
An' meet ye at the Spiel, Sirs.  
The Scot and Swede had neer a feid  
But aye were brithers fain, Sirs.  
An' side by side in martial pride  
They skailed their bluid like rain, Sirs ...

We'll no discuss your glorious Gus  
For whom that man o' worth, Sirs  
Dalgetly fought, as we've been taught  
By Wizard o' the North, Sirs.  
Oor thochts are bent wi' zeal intent  
On bluidless battles noo, Sirs  
On plain congealed as on the field  
Ye'll fin' us brithers true, Sirs ...

The Prince ye own as heir to throne,  
Can play a bonnie stane, Sirs  
We houp to say nae distant day  
The same aboot oor ain, Sirs ...<sup>110</sup>

Intriguingly, not only was a translation of this verse into Swedish included, but the copy held by the Bohuslän Archives has handwritten notes on the Scots/English copy which include English words corresponding to some of the Scots words and contractions – and quite a few handwritten question marks elsewhere.<sup>111</sup>

Swedish incomprehension of Mitchell's verse aside, however, some high-profile speakers at these gatherings were considering the practical effects of the Scottish-Swedish sporting relationship. Present at the January 1935 Edinburgh City Chambers gathering was Godfrey Collins MP, the Secretary of State for Scotland in the dying days of Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald's coalition government. Collins noted with envy the Swedish programme of physical education (in contrast to the Scottish 'problem of physical training') and aligned it to wider geopolitical currents suffused with race and eugenics:

Sport had a great appeal, not only in Sweden, but to every member of the Anglo-Saxon race. It brought out the very best in them. He was taught as a boy that, if at times some other countries were unable to understand the

outlook of our people, it was often because they had not appreciated that, deep down, we were imbued with the sport instinct.<sup>112</sup>

Collins's concerns might have reflected broader ones at the Scottish Office about physical activity.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, as with discussions of Scottish national identity which elided explicit mentions of British-ness, it is likely that Collins's comments also reflected how curling, not often a sport examined in scholarly historiography for its broader political meaning, nevertheless reflected both its own history and its specific circumstances at that moment.

## Conclusion

Curling, along with other current disciplines in the Winter Olympics, arguably represents the sporting culture of the 'global north': Jung Woo Lee states that, despite high-profile winter sport events being held in Asian countries (most notably the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea), such contests tend to be the preserve of affluent, *white* athletes, and must necessarily be viewed as such within this broader geopolitical context.<sup>114</sup> To some extent, what this article has discussed reflects elements of that; and, if the Scottish/Swedish relationship in curling has commonalities with that of football, there are also significant divergences in terms of class, social tone, and political utility that reflected the shared universe that global curling operated within.

The presence of curling in Sweden has been acknowledged by both Scottish and Swedish primary and secondary sources to be related to long-term cultural and economic links between the two nations: some of which predates the Union of 1707, but in terms of diasporatic connections was also visible well into the nineteenth century, when curling first appeared in Uddevalla. The practice and application of curling by the Thorburn-Macfie family may have represented a very bourgeois notion of Scottish-ness, but as reflected in curling's presence at the Nordic Games it also fit well with the birth of a 'sport movement' in Sweden led by the upper-middle and upper class. Accordingly, when semi-regular curling tournaments took place between Scottish and Swedish teams in the 1920s and 1930s, they certainly reflected a relationship which stressed a much longer continuity with the period when Scotland was an independent state. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the politicians and administrators who spoke at these events, they did not necessarily hint at any radical break with the largely conservative political consensus of the time, no matter the recent election of UK Governments ostensibly led by the Labour Party, or the creation of the pro-independence movement. In relation to Newby's work, historical continuities regarding anti-Catholicism and the racial status quo formed a part of the subtext of these formal and informal (and indeed, there is less hint of more radical

Jacobitism, no matter its importance in solidifying the long-term economic relationship of Scotland and Sweden).<sup>115</sup>

This article is meant to encourage further research regarding Scotland's sporting relationship with Nordic nations, and not necessarily just as a means to understanding the ongoing UK constitutional crisis and post-Brexit politics of the 2010s-20s. There are so many aspects of this relationship which have not been explored, and that is arguably also the case for Scotland's relationships (both as part of the UK and as a separate unit) with the rest of Europe. In general, the author concurs with Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, who a decade ago warned that British historians needed significant improvement in their efforts to understand British sport's historic relationship with continental Europe, particularly in their tendency to understand sport as a one-way transmission of the culture from the UK to the rest of the world.<sup>116</sup> This article is also meant to encourage other historians towards specifically examining the history of curling, a sport which has often been neglected in academic literature (save for some exceptions): the sport's unique historic place within Scotland's class system, along with its global geography, and its being used as a specifically constructed reflection of the Scottish (and British) nation, means that there is likely to be much more which historians are missing about the 'roaring game' – conclusions that this author would argue would significantly improve our understanding of 'the world of curling' off the ice itself. This article has provided an example of how the history of curling can be used to examine subtle elements of Scottish/British, Swedish/Scandinavian, and indeed European history.

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